The Dream to Make It: Football, Migration, and the New Religion of Escape

Overture: A Net Hung Between Earth and Sky

Some nights a ball arcs over corrugated roofs like a second moon. Some nights a bus crosses a border in the dark, shirts folded around passports and prayers. In both scenes, the same hush: **maybe this is the time**. Football and migration—two braided forces of our

century—are more than pathways; they are liturgies of escape. They promise a crossing from scarcity to abundance, anonymity to name, fear to applause. They demand faith, sacrifice, intermediaries, and luck. They crown saints and leave martyrs. They bind not just an individual but

a whole street, a whole family, a whole imaginary. This essay reads the dream to “make it” as a **saviour religion** of our global age. Not as a metaphor stretched for provocation’s sake, but as a structural homology: rites, priesthoods, scriptures, offerings, heresies, and afterlives.

I. The Homology: Why Football and Migration Feel the Same

Ritual Time. Training sessions and visa queues produce the same elastic hours—waiting, repeating, hoping.
Sacrifice. Families sell jewelry for boots; they

mortgage land for a plane ticket; they endure gossip, hunger, and postponed childhoods.

Intermediaries. Agents and scouts, brokers and coyotes, recruiters and consulates—the "clergy" who translate desire into possibility, and possibility into risk.

Miracle Logic. Outliers backfill belief. Maradona from Villa Fiorito, Tévez from Fuerte Apache, the cousin who “made it” to Madrid and now sends money home. One miracle sustains a thousand vigils.

Offering and Tithe.

Transfer fees, remittances, signing bonuses, and family allowances: where wealth is scarce, **circulating hope is a currency**.

Canon and Heresy. The canon says: talent + discipline + faith → ascent. Heresy whispers: luck, passports, politics,

timing, and algorithms decide more than virtue.

II. Sacred Spaces: Stadiums, Borders, and Bureaucratic Altars

Stadiums are cathedrals built for weekly revelation; borders are their shadow-chapels,

where revelation is bureaucratized. The turnstile and the turnback share a kinship —**who may enter, who must wait, who is chosen**. Where the stadium enacts belonging through spectacle, the border enacts exclusion through paperwork. Both produce

myth: the chosen few inside, the multitude outside, gazing.

III. Priests and Parasites: The Middlemen of Grace

Scouts, coaches, sports directors, academy directors—some are true pastors of talent. Others

are ushers of extraction. On the migration side: labor recruiters, language-school owners, immigration lawyers, smugglers, “uncles” with connections. Intermediaries **mediate fate**; this is their power. The poor rarely meet institutions directly—they meet **people** who

claim to speak for them. In that gap, miracles happen—and so do swindles. The dream is a marketplace where faith and fraud trade under the same awning.

IV. The Economy of Hope: Transfers, Remittances, and the Arithmetic of Escape

Clubs survive by selling futures—teenagers as derivatives priced against tomorrow's goals. **Families** survive by selling time—one child's future to redeem everyone's past-due bills. Remittances are **development from below**, a diaspora welfare

state wiring billions in steady streams that governments often fail to match. Yet the arithmetic is ruthless: for every household saved by a striker’s contract or a work visa, hundreds remain in the lottery queue. Poverty becomes *patient* because hope pays interest.

V. The Psychology of the Ticket

The ticket—the contract, the visa—reconfigures identity. Before it, the self is **contingent, collective** ("our boy," "our hope"). After it, the self is **portable, individual** ("my career," "my

papers”). That transition is violent. Survivor’s guilt tempers triumph; the gaze of home lingers in every away game. When the ticket fails—injury, release, denial at the border—the psyche must metabolize a cosmic downgrade: from chosen to ordinary. Some alchemize this into

mentorship; others into bitterness or self-harm. The dream offers elevation; it also offers **falls without handrails.**

VI. Scripture and Broadcast: How Myth Reproduces Itself

WhatsApp photos of first paychecks,

Instagram stories from European locker rooms, murals of hometown saints, YouTube compilations of nutmegs —**the gospel proliferates**. Media become sacraments: they are consumed weekly, renew belief, and recruit the next cohort of the faithful. In the absence

of robust public futures—jobs, safety, schools—myth is **public infrastructure**: it keeps morale alive.

VII. Gender: The Invisible Half of the Liturgy

The dream is coded male, but its **economy is**

female. Mothers stretch remittances, sisters take extra shifts, girlfriends turn into logistics managers of possibility. Meanwhile, women's football—still underfunded outside a few hubs—builds a quieter chapel of ascent, often with even steeper stairs and smaller doors.

In migration chains, women fill care economies abroad while men fill construction and delivery—two wings of the same cathedral of necessity. The religion of escape **feeds on unpaid female labor**; its saints are usually men, its treasurers usually women.

VIII. Saints, Martyrs, and Scapegoats

Saints: the few who arrive and remain.
Martyrs: the many who disappear into injury, paperwork, fatigue, or the sea.
Scapegoats: the ones who make it but “forget where they came from,”

or who return without wealth and absorb the community's disappointment. Every religion needs a grammar of exaltation and blame; this one is cruelly efficient.

IX. China, the Gulf, the Loan Spell: Pilgrimage Routes of

the 21st Century

The map of salvation keeps shifting. Yesterday: Argentina → Italy, Brazil → Spain, Senegal → France. Today: **China** for mid-career capital; **Saudi/UAE/Qatar** for late-career annuities; **loan farms** in Belgium, Portugal, and the

Netherlands as purgatories between promise and proof. Migration routes mirror this: Mexico-to-US corridors; West Africa-to-Europe corridors; Southeast Asia-to-Gulf care chains. The carriers differ; the logic rhymes. These are **pilgrimage routes** patrolled by

spreadsheets.

X. Reform Without Illusion

One can demand better: transparent academies, regulated agents, education baked into every youth contract; safe migration corridors, visa lotteries tied to genuine labor demand,

portable benefits across borders. But reform does not abolish religion; it **purifies** it. There will always be outliers, and outliers will always sanctify the gamble. The point is not to kill the dream; it is to **put mattresses under the fall** and **ladders beside the wall**.

XI. Afterlives: What Happens When the Music Stops

Cosy retirements exist—when planning, modesty, and luck meet. More often, afterlives are negotiated: coaching badges, small businesses, delivery vans, warehouse

shifts, night classes, aching knees. Return migrants repurpose foreign discipline into local entrepreneurship. Failed trials become **folk legends**: “He was the best I ever saw.” In many barrios, the museum of the dream lives in living rooms—shirts in frames, cleats by altars—for

stories told to children who will lace up again at dusk.

XII. A Future-Tense Benediction

What endures is not the scoreboard but the **organizing force of hope**. In neighborhoods where institutions fail, the

dream to make it is a governance technology—unofficial, unfair, indispensable. We can deride its odds and still honor its function. We can improve its corridors and still keep its fire. Because somewhere a ball is arcing over roofs and someone is crossing a border with their name

stitched into a small bag.
Between earth and sky
hangs the net;
sometimes it catches the
ball, sometimes the body.
The miracle is not that
few score—it's that in
the long dusk before
night, **people keep**
playing.
The religion of escape
will not fade; it will

mutate. Our task is to turn its sacraments from predation toward protection, to widen the doors without dimming the light, and to make sure that when the dream closes its eyes, the person who carried it still has a home to return to.